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ABSTRACT

For thousands of years metaphors have been used as a teaching device to help people grow, to understand, to develop ego strength, resilience and a quality of life. Each system of therapy has a set of metaphors in the form of a vocabulary. Fairy tales have messages on different levels and leave the metaphors open for interpretations. The power of the multiple meanings given to a story has an impact on the child or adult and has a therapeutic quality for the client. Therapists have used, consciously or unconsciously, parables and tales to help a client reframe and rebuild his life's misery, and the example of one young client illustrates a therapeutic technique. The fairy tale is therapeutic because the patient finds his own solution, through contemplating what the story seems to imply about himself and his inner conflicts at this moment in his life. The content of the chosen tale usually has nothing to do with the patient's external life, but much to do with his inner problems, which seem incomprehensible and hence unsolvable. Children learn value systems and develop a sense of well-being by listening to stories. Life-values, such as honesty, loyalty, self-control, politeness, patience, and caring, are implanted in the personality of the child through fairy tales. They become a motivator for good or bad behavior, promote a sense of well-being and provide resources for coping with upsets in future life. (One table of fairy tale titles and meanings is included, and 15 references are attached.) (RAE)

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THE IMPORTANCE OF METAPHORS IN FAIRY TALES IN PROMOTING EGOSTRENGTH VALUES AND WELL-BEING

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For thousands of years metaphors have been used as a teaching device to help people to grow, to understand, to develop egostrength, resilience and a quality of life. All cultures in their religious teaching use metaphors in their tales. The Sufis, Christians, and Buddhists, all believe that what is in your mind as an idea, as an image, will become reality in one's inner world and will guide one's actions. Each system of therapy has a set of metaphors in the form of a vocabulary. Jung developed the metaphor of the anima and animus. Berne has "games" and Perls has a "top dog" or "under dog", etc. Metaphors are not the experience themselves - metaphors are a way of talking about an experience. (D. Gordon) Our verbal communication is metaphorical. Verbal communication is an incomplete representation of a person's actual experience or thought process. Metaphors do not depend primarily on rational thought. Knowing metaphorically means to **grasp intuitively multiple meanings**. Every age group, child or adult, educated or simple minded, will find his or her meaning according to his own schema (Piaget) in the metaphors of fairy tales and parables alike.

Tales have messages of different levels and leave the metaphors open for interpretations. The power of the multiple meanings, that is given to a story, has an impact on the child or adult and has a therapeutic quality for the client. "Being told in a hidden round about way, through images and allegories, is

more effective than telling the naked truth" according to Paracelsius. Therapists have used, consciously or unconsciously, parables and tales (M. Erickson, David Gordon, S.B. Koop, Nosrat Peseschkian, O. Graf Wittgenstein, I Thiessen) to help a client reframe and rebuild his life´s misery. Bettelheim says: "The fairy tale is therapeutic because the patient finds his own solution, through contemplating what the story seems to imply about himself and his inner conflicts at this moment in his life. The content of the chosen tale usually has nothing to do with the patient´s external life, but much to do with his inner problems, which seem incomprehensible and hence unsolvable."

The following example might demonstrate how a fairy tale became a turning point towards healing in the process of therapy with a seriously, emotionally disturbed boy of eight years of age.

VIGNETTE

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The presented problems, of a boy of eight years of age, Stephen, were as follows:

> He disturbs the class with excessive mouth noises, soils his pants, and opposes all disciplinary actions of his single mother, who divorced her husband two years ago. Stephen blames his mother for the loss of his dad. He tells his mother, "I hate you." Stephen makes up stories that his mother interprets as lies, cannot obey, opposes everything that his mother request, acts babyish and throws temper tantrums. Stephen has a sister of six years of age and the therapy approach included his sister and his mother.
>
> During the first session because Stephen refused to enter my office, he was carried, kicking his feet, into the office, by his mother. He stuck out his tongue at his mother, saying, "I hate you." He refused to respond to anything I asked or to any toy I presented. Since Stephen attends a French Immersion School, in an all English Speaking environment, I started to address him in French. He responded with surprise, that I could speak French and from then on I gained his confidence.

During the third session I introduced Grimm's fairy tale, "Hansel and Gretel". This story contains the metaphors of parents who do not want to parent, of a father who does not protect his children, and of a boy and a girl who help each other. The ending is a happy one.

Following this he admitted openly that he blames his mother for everything, but at the same time he looked at her and I noticed in his looks that he started to doubt his accusations. It suddenly dawned on him that perhaps his mother was innocent. In the following conversation I stressed that Hansel and Gretel did not blame their parents and that the father and the new mother were happy to have the children back home.

The sessions to follow indicated a break through in the process of therapy. Stephen started to be more open and to allow himself to be involved in exchange of thoughts. Although, still in opposition to whatever was requested by his mother, the healing of his emotional wounds could be observed by his teacher, his mother and his therapist. After ten more sessions, Stephen was a different child; a child that could smile, a child that started to cooperate with adults, and a child that was ready to go on and to listen to others. A **reframing** had taken place.

Children learn value systems and develop a sense of well-being by listening to stories. Such life-values (Lebenswerte) are honesty, loyalty, self-control, politeness, patience, and caring. These values are implanted, through fairy tales, in the personality of the child and they become the motivator for good or bad behavior, for a sense of well-being and for coping with upsets in future life.

The following Table shows examples of German, Japanese and Islamic tales and their metaphors or messages. The German Grimm's fairy tales or Aesop's tales give a different message if compared to Sufi (Islamic) tales or Japanese tales. Each country has its own distinct metaphor that prevails. Grimm's tales always have positive endings regardless of how dangerous the situation is. The hero is always well meaning, ignorant and often helpless, but is always rescued. The Japanese tales give predominantly a message of a hero that fails and reaps the consequences or the hero is sacrificed and remains unaided. The Sufi tales are known as teaching tales. They most often give an explanation while fairy tales do not. Sufi tales teach cause and effect, understanding of others, and insight. The hero learns from mistakes and the listener learns through the heroes mistakes. Let us hear the famous Sufi tale of "The Watermelon and The Hunter" as told by J. Rumi (12th Century).

Once upon a time, there was a man who strayed from his own country into the world known as the Land of Fools. He soon saw a number of people flying in terror from a field where they had been trying to reap wheat. "There is a monster in that field," they told him. He looked, and saw that it was a water-melon.

He offered to kill the "monster" for them. When he had cut the melon from its stalk, he took a slice and began to eat it. The people became even more terrified of him than they had been of the melon. They drove him away with pitchforks, crying, "He will kill us next, unless we get rid of him."

It so happened that at another time another man also strayed into the Land of Fools, and the same thing started to happen to him. But, instead of offering to help them with the "monster," he agreed with them that it must be dangerous, and by tiptoeing away from it with them he gained their confidence. He spent a long time with them in their houses until he could teach them, little by little, the basic facts which would enable them not only to lose their fear of melons, but even to cultivate them themselves.

This story draws attention to the different levels of human understanding: meaning a man can only be reached on his level of understanding. How often do we as teachers or therapists explain a problem or issue, only to find out later that the client or

student draws a completely different meaning from our words - a meaning we never intended.

Each country has its own distinct quality of tales but all have metaphors that are intuitively comprehended and absorbed. Tales impress the listener with the importance of values and attitudes still to be learned. If we ask ourselves where did we get our attitudes and values from and when did these values develop perhaps we can recall images or fairy tales that impressed us and formed our values when we were children. Those values become guiding poles in times of distress. Those early established values become integrated as ego strengths and form a sense of well being.

Fairy Tale	Origin	Metaphoric Message
Fatima and The Animals	Sufis	Understand differences in personalities, learn tolerance, everyone is on a different level of understanding.
Moses and The Shepherd Whom Moses Called a Blasphemer	Sufis	
The King and The Wolf	Sufis	Do not try to change what nature has predetermined, do not be a hypocrite.
The Flute	Japanese	A father who neglects his parenting responsibility;irresponsibility causes pain.
The Sea-king and the Magic Flute	Japanese	Forgetting a commitment, lack of parenting.
The Wind and the Sun	Aesop, Greek	Gentleness achieves more than violence. You will win with kindness.
Fox and Crow	Aesop, Greek	Be aware of flattery. Flattery finds favours.
Jataka Tales	Birth Stories of Buddha	Determination and perseverance, power of evil is overcome.
Hansel and Gretel	German	A mother who does not want to be a mother (stepmother and witch), a weak father, courage, mutual caring, risking, help is guaranteed through wisdom, thinking ahead and action.
Red Riding Hood	German	Obeying rules of authority, controlling tempting behavior, resurrection, help is forthcoming even if the hero is misguided.

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